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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 3280  
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0105  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 3298  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 6186  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2371  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 3942  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 1437  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 1199  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 2101  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 2071  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0437  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 2755  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 8950  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1101  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 000888

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [ASEC](#) [OVIP](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [IN](#) [IR](#) [DA](#)

SUBJECT: CARTOON WARS: INDIAN MUSLIMS (BARELY) PROTEST

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Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

11. (SBU) Summary: Indian Muslim reaction to the controversy over publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper spilled out into the streets on February 6 in the form of a peaceful city-wide strike in Muslim-majority Srinagar, a student demonstration in New Delhi, and small protests elsewhere, but in general the Indian reaction was muted. Police stopped the New Delhi protest from reaching the Danish Embassy after marchers reportedly threw stones, but no other violence was reported. The low-key response is representative of India's Muslim community, in many ways mindful of global trends affecting Muslims, but disinclined to espouse the more radical viewpoints that flourish elsewhere. Anti-US politicians and community leaders will likely roll the cartoon protests into larger agitation planned over the Iran IAEA vote and the upcoming visit of President Bush, but are unlikely to stir up significant anti-US emotions. Sixty years of democracy have convinced Indian Muslims of the value of free speech, for better or worse. End Summary.

Public Protests but No Threats  
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12. (U) As the Indian media picked up stories of violent clashes elsewhere in Asia and the Middle East, a few hundred students gathered at Jamia Millia Islamia university in Southeast New Delhi to protest the Danish publication on February 6. Poloff, who was at the campus for other business, witnessed small groups chanting and holding signs in the morning, but when the group assembled closer to the diplomatic quarter of New Delhi to march to the Danish Embassy in the afternoon, police broke up the protest with

water cannons after allegedly being pelted with stones. No injuries were reported, and a small student delegation was later allowed to present a written protest to the Danish Embassy.

13. (SBU) Michael Just Hjortso, Danish PolCouns, told Poloff on February 7 that the Danish Embassy received a heavy police cordon on February 6, but the Embassy was unaware of the size of the protest or the police actions until reports surfaced in the media. The first Indian interest in the cartoons followed the original publication in September, Just Hjortso reported, with a day-long strike in Srinagar and an MEA diplomatic note expressing "dismay" over the cartoons. The Danish Embassy has informed the GOI of subsequent statements of apology by the Danish Foreign Ministry and Prime Minister, and the GOI has made no further official demarches on the subject, Just Hjortso confirmed. The Danish Embassy saw no threat to its citizens or interests, he added, and had no plans to issue a travel advisory for India.

Elsewhere in India...

14. (SBU) Police in Mumbai beefed up their presence at a locally-staffed Danish Consulate in Mumbai, but no demonstrators appeared on February 6. ConGen Mumbai's Muslim contacts report that Mumbai Muslims will likely engage in protests after the holiday marking the tenth day of Muharram on February 9, or after Friday prayers on February 10. The Jammu and Kashmir High Court Bar Association, supported by local trade unions, instigated a day-long strike in the Kashmir Valley on February 6 that local journalists called "near total." Pioneer reporter Khursheed Wani told us that while businesses and government offices were nearly deserted

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because of the transportation shutdown, many would have remained at home in any case to watch the India-Pakistan cricket match. The capital city Srinagar witnessed scattered demonstrations but no violence, contacts said.

15. (C) According to Embassy contacts, Maulana Kalbe Jawaad, a prominent pro-Iranian cleric in Lucknow, the center of India's Shia minority population, attempted to organize a demonstration against Denmark and the US, but was unable to gather enough supporters (or find any handy Danish flags to burn). Many Muslims in Lucknow avoid watching television during the holy month of Muharram, and so have steered clear of the cartoon controversy. Maulana Agha Roohi Abaqati told us that Jawaad and his fellow agitators, led by the Uttar Pradesh state Samajwadi Party (SP), plan to tie the anti-Denmark protests to anti-US and anti-GOI agitation over the next week to protest the Iran IAEA vote and the upcoming POTUS visit. In the southern centers of Muslim population in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, few demonstrations were noted except one "extremist-led" march in Kanhangad, Kerala, in which protesters burnt a French flag before police arrested 39 youths. COMMENT: Maybe it was the only European flag available. END COMMENT.

Interested Parties Trying to Fan the Flames...

16. (C) In a February 6 meeting with Poloff, Imam Bukhari of Delhi's Jamma Mosque reported that he was under considerable pressure to participate in anti-American and anti-cartoon demonstrations. He emphasized, however, that he rebuffed overtures from Mahmood As'ad Madani, the General Secretary of the Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind and the management of "Rashtriya Sahara," the Urdu language newspaper of the Sahara group. Bukhari purportedly refused to endorse their campaigns, telling the organizers that it would "embarrass" the Mosque and its management, as it is a "public institution," which should not become enmeshed in political protests. Bukhari confirmed that as an Imam he felt obligated to make a public statement condemning the cartoons, but had tried to keep it

reasonable and mild.

¶7. (C) Bukhari claimed that his biggest problem was dealing with India's Urdu media. The media, he said, routinely takes little issues and tries to make them into big ones, and often puts an anti-American spin on issues that do not involve the US. He was particularly upset with "Rashtriya Sahara," which he said was being very unhelpful by sponsoring a "Bush go back" campaign and pestering Muslim leaders to participate. In Bukhari's view, the paper was not genuinely interested in Muslims, but was acting at the behest of Uttar Pradesh politician Amar Singh and his SP, which is embroiled in a feud with the Congress Party.

Comment: It's Just Smoke, No Fire  
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¶8. (C) The conjunction of India's vote against Iran in the IAEA, the publication of the Danish cartoons and the impending POTUS visit has resulted in considerable ferment in the Indian Muslim community. Opportunistic troublemakers have combined the news frenzy over the cartoons with broader complaints against the West and the US to promote domestic political advantage, or Iranian interests. Our contacts confirm that the Iranian Embassy has been very active in recent weeks, devising ambitious anti-US programs and approaching Bukhari and other influential Muslims to participate. However, the peaceful nature of the protests

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here demonstrates yet again the resistance in the Indian Muslim community to violence or radicalization. Although some anti-Western and anti-US sentiments circulate in the 148-million strong Muslim population, Indian Muslims, like their compatriots of other religions, tend to hold favorable views toward the West and the US, and are proof that an active public outreach effort can have a positive effect on host country populations. For example, we have met regularly with Imam Bukhari over the past six months and his appreciation of the positive attention contributed to his apparent decision to keep the anti-US crowd at bay. Shia clerics in Lucknow who are in regular contact with the Embassy and regularly receive Embassy mailings have also helped promote a message of moderation and harmony, with Shia Maulanas criticizing Jawaad and other Iranian-supported clerics and highlighting the assistance the US has provided to Shia in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. Finally, this episode shows that Indian Muslims value free speech - even when offensive - thanks to sixty years of democracy.

¶9. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:  
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)  
MULFORD